

Zaman, Muhammad Qasim: *Islam in Pakistan: A History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018, 432 pp., ISBN: 978-0-691-14922-6.

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Islam in Pakistan: A History, by Muhammad Qasim Zaman, is an intellectual history of Islamic modernism in relation to its rivals: the traditional ‘ulama and the Islamist religio-political parties. The book traces the fortunes of these different Islamic orientations, especially the decline in Islamic modernism, over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, from the last decades of the British period through the seventy year history of Pakistan. Zaman approaches this topic through a detailed examination of the writings of representative ideologues of modernism, traditionalism, and Islamism, with a particular focus on debates about the desired nature of the Pakistani state, legal reform, and the position of religious minorities. While Zaman reviews Pakistan’s political history and various moments of mass agitation, his focus remains on the intellectual debates rather than attempting a sociological or ethnographic approach.

Zaman’s comprehensive presentation of these debates is both timely and long overdue. While it is unwise to overestimate the role of religion in shaping Pakistani history—a history of chronic economic underdevelopment, oscillation between military misrule and weak democracy, ethno-linguistic conflict, struggles between the central government and regional demands for autonomy, and an unenviable position at the frontline of the two major global conflicts of the last seventy years, the Cold War and the War on Terror—disagreements about the nature of Islam and its appropriate relationship to the state run through many of the issues that roil Pakistani society from the status of religious minorities, to laws on marriage, divorce, and domestic violence, to how to combat or contain Islamist militancy.

Zaman defines Islamic modernism as a “complex of religious, intellectual, and political initiatives aimed at adapting Islam [...] to the challenges of life in the modern world.” (3) The modernists claim that the true values of Islam embodied in the Qur’an and the example of the Prophet are largely in accord with modern liberalism and the nation-state, and are not necessarily represented by the scholarly tradition of Islam as it has developed over the centuries. This latter scholarly tradition is the basis for the claim to religious authority of the ‘ulama, whose members in Pakistan mostly adhere to either the Deobandi or the Barelvi traditions. Meanwhile, the Islamist groups, such as Mawdudi’s Jama’at-i

Islami, are suspicious of both Western liberal values and what they view as the built up accretions of the Islamic scholarly tradition.

Zaman traces the fortunes of these three orientations from their origins in the British period through independence and the formation of the Pakistani state up to the present moment. Many of the personalities (e. g. Ashraf Ali Thanawi, Muhammad Iqbal, Fazlur Rahman, Abu 'Ala Mawdudi) and events (e. g. the Khilafat Movement, the 1949 Objectives Resolution, the anti-Ahmadi agitations) discussed in the book will be known to readers familiar with the history and pre-history of Pakistan. What Zaman provides are the detailed ins and outs of the debates on these issues and the negotiations, contentions, and alliances between the state and the proponents of the different Islamic orientations. The different positions taken by the modernists, the traditionalist 'ulama, and Islamists on the nature and limits of state sovereignty and on what it might mean for Pakistan to be an *Islamic* state are the primary focus of Zaman's discussion. The increasing exclusion of religious minorities, especially Ahmadis, and the beleaguered position of traditional Sufi practices are also addressed.

The question that animates Zaman's project is how and why did Islamic modernism lose its intellectual vitality and never succeed in displacing the religious authority of the traditionalist 'ulama among the general populace, nor withstand the rise of Islamism, despite modernism's prominence in the early decades of Pakistan's history. One factor is the modernists' lack of any independent institutional bases, comparable to the associations and ever-multiplying madrasas of the 'ulama or the Islamist organizations and political parties. Another factor impeding modernism's appeal outside of elite circles might be the contradiction that Zaman points out between the modernists' proclamation of an ethic of justice and equality and their close alliances or even collusion with Pakistan's authoritarian rulers. But is this really a contradiction? An ideology whose conception of justice focuses mostly on the civil liberties of the individual without a serious critique of the economic and power structures that constrain the lives and prosperity of the vast majority of the Pakistani population will have a limited appeal for any but the elite. And the position of the ruling elite is tied to the stability of the state, even when that must be maintained through authoritarian measures. This may also be the root of modernism's lack of institution building and decline in intellectual creativity. "Modernism's control of or proximity to the levers of political power has not required a concomitant investment in the bolstering of its intellectual defenses." (p. 277)

While highlighting modernism's decline, Zaman also notes its continuing survival; "the Pakistani governing elite retain their modernist impulses" (p. 277), modernist legislation such as the 1961 Muslim Family Laws Ordinance continues

to stand while the draconian Hudood Ordinance has been defanged, and modernist arguments continue to be deployed by the judiciary and the government to avoid executing those accused of blasphemy. It would be a worthwhile project for another scholar to examine the roots of this survival within the judiciary, the state bureaucracy, and elite education and culture.

Although Zaman treats his material with great detail and comprehensiveness, there is one topic that is not addressed directly despite the fact that it permeates the history that he recounts. This is gender and the status of women. Many of the debates Zaman describes between the traditionalist ‘ulama, the modernists, and the Islamists concern the regulation of marriage, divorce, sexuality, and domestic violence, from the 1939 Muslim Marriages Bill (40) to the 1961 Muslim Family Laws (65), the legalization of birth control (71), the 1979 Hudood Ordinance (87), and the 2006 Protection of Women Bill (117). Yet, unlike the chapters devoted to the issues of minority rights, the nature of the state, and Sufism, nowhere in the book do we find a unified analysis of the gender ideology of the three orientations. Perhaps the author believes that sufficient attention has been paid to this issue by the many works on women and Islam. However, it would be extremely useful to have such an analysis within the context provided by Zaman. Certain questions are left unasked and unanswered, such as why is it women’s rights that are so consistently at the heart of disagreements between the different Islamic orientations, rather than the many other areas that could fall under the modernist ethic of justice and liberty or the ‘ulama’s conception of the reach of Shari’a? Why has the state been able, at least nominally, to defend the rights of women but not the rights of minorities? How do the different gender ideologies factor into the appeal of modernism for Pakistan’s Westernized elite and its lack of success with the rest of the population?

Islam in Pakistan is an invaluable resource for any serious student of religion and politics in South Asia. Deeply researched, it delves into the complex intellectual debates and negotiations behind many of the most important developments in Pakistan’s political and religious history. A brief review cannot do justice to its wealth of detail and insightful analysis.